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Author

Keim, Kevin

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Multi-Sourcing

Kevin Keim

When Charles Moore wrote or spoke about influence, he often ended up quoting T.S. Eliot.

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

On October 31st, 2003, architects, artists, and musicians gathered for a symposium, “Multi-Sourcing,” at the Charles W. Moore Center for the Study of Place. (The date was especially apropos because Halloween was the anniversary of Moore’s 1925 birth, and a holiday when people absorb new, exotic identities.)

Multi-sourcing is about reaching out and learning from all kinds of images and ideas. “We want to make sense of the way our world now is,” the symposium’s chairman Donlyn Lyndon said, “with its plethora of images and ways of combining them.” Multi-sourcing is about drawing in ideas, images, impulses, observations from the world around us, and using them to enrich work — to let us give buildings and places more opportunities to connect to people’s imaginations. Multi-sourcing creates potential, just as mathematical multiplying does for numbers. It expands thought. It sparks creative opportunity.

But the symposium was not just about talk, about merely the act of being absorptive. It was actually about the next, more important step: making real things, real places. How does one take all those images, and confidently make them into something tangible.

A Venue for Inspiration

The symposium was held in a hotspot of multi-sourcing, the Moore/Andersson Compound in Austin, Texas. Moore and Andersson designed the compound to be a synthesis of antipodal images of Texas architecture: the Hispanic vernacular (and its Law of the Indies origins), and the more casual, bucolic German vernacular of the countryside and open range. The Spanish model, thick-walled and defensive, focuses inward into the courtyard; the German model, thin-walled and porched, opens to the wide-open land.

They then layered onto this fundamental base (that sets it in its place) many “stolen” or “borrowed” sources. These are just a few: the wagon entrance from Sherwood Ranch in Salinas (“to celebrate act of arrival”); a Turkish opium den (with luxurious seats for napping); a Borromini window frame (rendered in economical Styrofoam instead of costly travertine); columns from the Catalan School of Music (painted sono tubes instead of meticulous

mosaic); a Maybeckian arbor (covered with Texas trumpet creeper); a staircase from the Bantry House (to climb and pause upward); and a pool from Lunuganga (to cool the courtyard and hint at Islamic memories). All of these exotic sources are nestled in the engaging whole, and an immense collection of folk art adds yet more layers. Despite (or because of!) this multitude of images, the house is not awash in confusion, but awash in mystery. Nuances are continually discovered. It is multi-sourcing at its best, emblematic of Moore’s distinguishing catholicity.

In fact, Charles Moore’s life epitomized multi-sourcing, in that he refused to be bound by a single, canonical mode of thought. In others words, it all mattered. In this setting, symposium participants spoke about the multiple sources in their diverse works of architecture, music and art.

Hugh Hardy’s recurring theme was “Old and New,” of the multi-sources of time and context. Context, Hardy pointed out, is possible because architecture is a language, and continuity makes language possible. “You can’t talk about new without context,” Hardy said. “And the end-result is that we now have a new eclecticism that is full of optimism. The universe is indeed expanding!”

One of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer’s special interests is to rejuvenate unused and forlorn buildings, giving them new life, both in their structures and their uses. Theaters, for instance, literally come alive with Hugh Hardy’s touch. Where the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Majestic Theater, and Radio City Music Hall had suffered the indignities of old age, Hardy “restored” their structures and interiors — allowing new life, new multi-sources of music, dance, and theater to once again fill their auditoriums.

Likewise, “Bridgemarket,” under New York’s 59th Street Bridge, borrowed from the sources of its own history when it provided for the connection to and marketing of goods from Queens. Here, Guastavino vaulting, the architecture of Henry Hornbostle, and the dramatic upward sweep of the bridge’s structure all fed into the design for the new retail and restaurant spaces beneath the bridge.

And for the abandoned St. Anne’s Church (designed by James Renwick), Hardy filled the soaring spaces and choir lofts with classrooms for new life as a school. (The rafters, gargoyles, stained glass, and Gothic tracery pleased students, since it now became a realm similar to those encountered in Harry Potter.) “One should embrace the opportunities of the vast resources available to us now.”

From Architecture to Music and Sculpture

David Harington, violinist and one of the founders of the Kronos Quartet, presented a “D-J” session, narrating layers of sounds, samples from his constant, compulsive



probing into global music. “Hearing something that might be possible,” he said, “is often the starting point for a new direction.”

Where many musicians and composers limit themselves to a school of thought, Kronos does just the opposite. All of music is their domain. All sounds, all music traditions, all performance modes — and now even projected images — are potential sources. (In fact, the act of commissioning new work is as integral to Kronos’ identity as its performances.) Some of the multi-sources Harrington referenced were Inuit throat singing, recordings of Panamanian street scenes, Indian vocalists on racy film soundtracks, and even the incessant, rhythmic drones of frogs and crickets from a nature documentary.

“Restoration,” Harrington realized after hearing Hugh Hardy’s presentation, is just what the Kronos Quartet does. Each of their performances is a restoration of a piece of music into audible reality. Later that evening, in fact, Harrington was joined by his three colleagues for an extraordinary concert in the Hanzlik House in Austin.

Architect Arthur Andersson spoke about the cues his firm, Andersson Wise, borrows from when it undertakes the making of a new place. The Washington State History Museum in Tacoma, for instance, was designed by Moore and Arthur Andersson to multi-source the grandiose Beaux-Arts train station, centrally planned and domed, an adjacent landmark familiar to everyone in the reemerging industrial city. The History Museum became an extension of the venerable structure so that it seems to be a late extension of the building, as a row of grand arches confidently marches along Pacific Avenue, adding to its sense of place. Or in Austin, a new classroom building for the campus of St. Edward’s University borrows from various sources proffered by earlier structures. An imaginative concrete wall is cast with shapes that echo its nineteenth-century neighbors. It stakes its own claim on campus, but helps the whole become a more recognizable, coherent — but interesting — place.

Sculptor and installation artist Margo Sawyer spoke about the multi-sources of her own work, absorbed during her extensive travels. She spoke of Indian temple

complexes that influenced her perceptions of space and hierarchy; spice vendors in Bombay who arrange piles of vivid color on white sheets spread out on sidewalks; and classical gardens that create sacred space on earth. With these sources, Sawyer abstracted the images of India into sculpture. In spare rooms, she would arrange shiny, powder-coated metal boxes to create a quilt of color, referencing city plans, clusters of buildings, or even the layouts of computer parts that are now the invisible network of our lives.

When Sawyer was working in Tokyo on fellowship, she multi-sourced high and low cultures: Japanese stone gardens and pachinko parlors. Borrowing from the contemplative stillness and frenetic gambling energy of each, she created extraordinary installations in which tens of thousands of stainless-steel ball bearings were carefully arranged in astonishing patterns on gallery floors. Side by side, the ball bearings were pushed into perfect geometric patterns, or allowed to randomly expose rifts and fissures reminiscent of streams. Blocks then floated on this shimmering carpet, creating a reverie of color and form.

“The overstimulation, the abundance of our world, makes us more multi-resourceful. How do you convert them, make a new alchemy?” asked architect Carlos Jimenez. In Columbus, Indiana, Jimenez drew from its celebrated architecture pedigree and sources for a new child development center. Lessons of Aldo von Eyck and Federico Garcia Lorca helped him to create a protective but stimulating world for children.

Jimenez also wondered how one could draw on sources in Houston, a city where context is, in reality, utterly random. For a new archive at Rice University (to be built on a remote site, not on its oasis-like campus) Jimenez nonetheless drew from the sources of campus, but also the industrial, commercial “vernacular” of the larger city, including freeways, concrete culverts, and thin metal skins. With a limited budget, and a task to house a million fragile volumes, Jimenez took advantage of the multiple fragments of context in Houston to make a place connected to campus and city.

Previous page: The Moore/Andersson compound in Austin, Texas, a synthesis of antipodal images and borrowed sources. Photo by Jacob Termansen.

Facing page

Left: Moore/Andersson compound. Decorated sono tubes and folk art. Photo by Jacob Termansen.

Right: Playlist from the Kronos Quartet’s David Harrington.

Bottom: Restoration of the BAM Harvey Theater (formerly BAM Majestic). Photo courtesy of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates.



David Harrington Playlist

1. Street Music of Panama: track 6: an old man and a ten-year-old boy bowling in the night (Original Music - OMCD 008).
2. Getatchew Makurya: track 3: "Aha Gedawo" (Ethiopian Battle Music for Saxophone).
3. Mickey Katz, *Greatest Shticks*: track 10: "Sixteen Tons" (Koch 059) [klezmerized American folk music].
4. Kalama's Quartet: track 6: "Wahine Ui" ("Beautiful Young Woman") (Arhoolie Folklyric 7028) [incredibly beautiful Hawaiian Male, 1930s quartet].
5. Tanya Tagag: untitled, unreleased: Inuit throat singing [Jimi Hendrix of throat singers].
6. Tajra (Music of Sardinia): track 26: "Lamentu di Maria" (Lara 001) [amazingly beautiful choir].
7. Animal Music: track 3: Team of Jeremy Roht (Suppose) [dogs singing in the Yukon Territory].
8. The Tradition of Kantele, Vol. 3, The New Era Ri-tra Koistinen Performs: Aro Part "Pari Intervallo" [The Finnish National Instrument].
9. Bandy-kid America and the Action 2 of Figures: track 3: "Muffinman" (Plug Records) [distorted kids music].
10. Suba: Sao Paulo Confessions: track 5: "Antropofagos" (Six Degree Records) [Brazilian electronica].
11. Sounds of North American Frogs: tracks 1-3 (Smithsonian Folkways).

